

Psalm 118:1-2 & 14-24

John 20:1-18

WHY ARE YOU WEeping?

Sisters and brothers, as I have said before, miracles still happen,
because God is always present and loves his people.

There are many reasons that we cry.

When we think about people crying,
we know that tears reflect our regrets in life—
the errors we make, our bad choices,
our embarrassments, our wounded pride... our ego.

We also cry when we are frightened—

when we are so afraid we don't know what to do.

And we cry when we are frustrated—

when we don't know what to do with the boiling mixture of emotions:
anger, humiliation, irritation, discouragement, confusion...

We get stuck and have no clear way out,
and we find ourselves crying in anguish.

Oddly enough, we also cry when we are joyful, happy or relieved.

We cry when we experience, as Wordsworth said about poetry,

“the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings
[that come] from emotion recollected in tranquility”.

We look back, relive through memory,

and we cry as we release pent-up emotions.

We cry in sympathy for others.

And of course we cry, perhaps most often, when we are sad,

so tears are usually interpreted by others
as a sign of sorrow, unhappiness, gloom and grief.

When Mary Magdalene came to the empty tomb,
and saw the stone rolled away,
she quite naturally thought the body of Jesus had been removed
and she was deeply distressed.

The disciples didn't know what to do,
so they went back to where they had been staying—hiding, really;
but ever faithful Mary stood outside the tomb and wept.

Two angels inside the tomb, sitting where his body had been laid,
asked her, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

What else could she answer but this:

“They have taken my Lord away,
and I don't know where they have put him!”

Perhaps feeling a sudden presence behind her, Mary then turned around
and saw a man standing there.

She thought he was the gardener.

This man also asked her, “Woman, why are you weeping?

Who are you looking for?”

So she asked him very respectfully to tell her,
if he had carried it away,

where he had put the body of Jesus so she could get it back.

Mary was weeping.

In grief. In frustration. In fear.

Possibly also in anger.

The Lord's body was gone,
and no one seemed to know where it was or
why it had been taken away.

What was she to do?

But she was determined to get him back,
to bury him properly,
even though Peter and John had come, looked,
and returned to their hiding place,
for they still did not understand, not one of them,
that Jesus had risen from the dead.

So here is Mary, *crying*, and being challenged again,

“Woman, why are you weeping?”

Yet when Jesus simply says her name, “Mary,”
she immediately knows he is no gardener—
he is her rabbi, her teacher, her friend, her Lord and master, Jesus,
risen from the dead.

We can imagine she throws her arms wide to hug him in joyful relief,

now with *joyful* tears streaming down her cheeks—

yet Jesus cautions her not to hold onto him;

instead, he sends her to report to the disciples

that Jesus said, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father,
to my God and your God.”

And Mary does indeed run back to the disciples

with the astonishing news, “I have seen the Lord!”

I imagine there was a lot of crying going on in that room—

tears of joy, tears of fearful confusion as they wondered

“what should we do now?”

and tears of relief: he was not dead, he was not gone,
he was alive again.

People of God, we know the traditional greeting that all Christians
around the world share on Easter morning is a simple statement
of the good news: “He is risen!”

And the reply of all who hear this greeting is
an equally simple yet powerful agreement,
“He is risen indeed!”

Do not grieve, for death is defeated.

Do not fear, for the Lord is with us.

Do not doubt, but rather embrace the faith God has given you
and let it continue to grow as you share it with others—
for that is the remarkable thing about God-given faith.

The more we give it away, the stronger it grows within us.

Jesus died for our sins to give us eternal life.

Jesus rose from the dead to show the way.

People of God, he is risen!

And in his resurrection, along with his presence with us

(“remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Mt 28:20),

Our Lord and Savior is indeed with all of us,

those we love and cherish, our neighbors, our helpers...

right now, seeing us through this awful plague

with loving care, comfort, and a spirit of encouragement.

We pray:

Wherever we are:

LORD God, you are the author of life.

Only you can restore physical life into a long-dead body.

And only you can restore spiritual life that has long been missing.

We thank you, we glorify you, we worship you,

and we count on you, especially during these devastating times,

to bless us with continuing faith and health.

In your precious name we pray,

Amen.